

# Lisbon Municipal Medal of Cultural Merit speech

15<sup>th</sup> Novembre 2024

## Introduction

New York, 1965, Rockefeller Plaza

They told me: Destination Lisbon ....**in three weeks.**

Take as many Portuguese lessons as you want."

"Only one condition: keep working on your Midnight to 8 am shift on the World 24 desk for the Associated Press in New York until the eve of your departure and cut your ties with the Big Apple at the start of January **1965.**" Of course, I knew Spanish and French ... and could manage to learn from my instructor some Brazilian tinged **Portuñol...** but on three hours of sleep a night, it was thin.

Of course, I knew Lisbon from literature.

I had studied "Candide or Optimism" by Voltaire and the earthquake of 1755, which nearly wiped the city from the maps ...but placed it at the center of the world, and in the heart of an intellectual debate about the meaning of life.

As a student of Classics, I was riveted by the symbolism of etymology and the roots of the city of Ulisses, and its vocation as the supplier to the Roman Empire of the stinky fish condiment called **Garum.**

I was looking forward to the "celestial" vision of Lisbon evoked by **Lord Byron** from the seas. I had also heard **Erich Maria Remarque's** "the night in Lisbon" preceding a "luminosity" in the morning. And the atmosphere of "sleepy nostalgia" evoked by the Luso American **John dos Passos.**

And again, there was a certain fascination about **World War II**, which brought the author of " the Little Prince" **Antoine de St. Exupery** to the **Lisbon** docks on a transit stop to exile in the **United States.**

I remembered **Humphrey Bogart** made **Ingrid Bergman** board a plane to **Lisbon** in the movie "**Casablanca**" telling her **she would regret it if she stayed.**

"Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon... and for the rest of your life"

That was how much I knew as I arrived at the airport of **Portela.**

I did not know that many years later, the airport would be renamed in memory of murdered opposition leader "**Humberto Delgado**" whose body remains I went to discover near Badajoz with a lawyer called Mario Soares only a few weeks after my arrival, under the watchful eye of some Pide agents.

As a journalist, I had covered the **Washington** funeral of **JFK**, and the "swinging sixties" was bringing civil rights battles to the streets and to the boxing ring, with such personalities, as **Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Mohamed Ali** while the specter of the **Vietnam** war loomed with its shadow over the **USA**.

So, at **age 23** I did know the **Lisbon** was very small in the **US** unconscious, and that I would have to **fight** for every inch of space in the **USA** and world media if I wanted to tell stories about a small poor country like **Portugal** and a once global city like **Lisbon**.

And there was another obstacle, which forbade me to ferret out facts which could only be printed abroad. But it had to be verified and reverified if I didn't want to be expelled or arrested... **CENSORSHIP**.

Some of you today cannot recall that the blue pencil of censors worked daily to expurgate any negative narrative to the regime. The **only** way **Lisboetas** could find out was through what was printed in **foreign papers or broadcasters** which arrived here **ONE OR TWO DAYS LATER** ...or the gossip from mouth to ear... usually exaggerated or unknown facts.

## Part 2

One of the first lessons about censorship and control of information by the Estado Novo took place at my offices in Praca da Alegria when eight Pide agents sought me for a reason **I ignored**.

After eluding them for 24 hours... (although I already knew my mail, phone and telex were monitored) a negotiation between the Foreign Ministry and the US embassy allowed an interrogation to take place at Rua António Maria Cardoso.

The police was intent on finding out the SOURCE of an article printed in many international newspapers about **two students** who were mistreated in their custody—a girl who crushed her glasses and tried to swallow them, and a student who broke his vertebrae and ribs in a fall or push from the first floor of a prison. Police feared more student activity at the university against the Salazar education system would be triggered by this news...again by reaching print in **foreign publications**. The article was accurate. But the aim of my **day and night** long interrogation was to incriminate the anonymous sources where I obtained the information. It didn't happen.

For three years, I kept being **summoned** by **Pide** or threatened with expulsion by the foreign ministry and the SNI, who challenged my reporting. All this was amply documented 50 years later when I **declassified** my PIDE, SNI and other dossiers at the **Torre do Tombo**.

I was branded a "subversive". And the defense minister in an official communication to the Foreign Ministry was infuriated when we had totaled up the tiny official death notices from the government, counted them and located them in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. The official statistics showed that the victims of the colonial war were **actually higher** than American soldiers lost in the first years of the Vietnam war. We had proved the point with Portugal's own statistics.

The battle for press and cultural freedom was also fought by many Portuguese in civil society as the late 1960s started spelling the end of the **Salazar** and **Caetano** regimes before the **25 of april**.

Three courageous women--the publisher **Snu Abecasis**, **Vera Lagoa**, who created the first gossip column, and **Natalia Correia** the poet and novelist, were among those who pushed the limits.

Even 19th century Russian and East European authors like **Chekhov**, **Dostoevski** and **Tolstoi** had never been read in Portuguese and were

published by **Edições Dom Quixote**. **Snu** even organized a poetry reading in the Teatro de Revista of Parque Mayer with the dissident Evgeny Yevtushenko. It became one of the memorable scenes of the **2018 RTP series "Três mulheres"** by the movie director **Fernando Vendrell**.

Another North Star of my Portuguese voyage was **Francisco Balsemão**, who pushed the limit in his *Diário Popular*, with whom I shared news which could not be published in the Portuguese media.

Throughout his career, Balsemão has never lost the compass of press freedom via his newspapers, magazines and television and championed it throughout his life.

Innumerable others in those years fought through the pen rather than the sword. I had the honor of spending some time in the living room of **Sofia de Melo Breyner**, and also met **Luís Sttau Monteiro**, **António Alçada Baptista**, **Urbano Tavares Rodrigues**, and so many others.

Looking through my old articles from those days I have been astonished to see influence of brave Portuguese **women** in my most successful articles: **Inês de Castro**, **Mariana Alcoforado**, **Maria Lamas**, **Amália Rodrigues**, **Vieira da Silva** (in exile)...

### Part 3

I left Portugal in 1968 for Rome, also covering the events of Paris about which the Portuguese regime feared "contagion".

This bubbling cauldron of society which I witnessed, **preceded** the fall from the chair of **Salazar**, and the subsequent arrival of the captains in **1974**.

But I was destined to observe the **Portuguese Revolution** from **Brazil** where I had a new post reporting on the dictatorships of South America.

"**Stay where you are**" was the response to my pleas to travel to Lisbon to follow the uncertain steps of The Revolution. In a twist of irony, my father, who was CBS correspondent, in Paris, witnessed the return of the exiles **Soares** and **Cunhal** in **Santa Apolónia** station.

Instead, I took my revenge on destiny a few months later, **in 1975**, when I scored a world scoop. **General António Spínola**, after an unsuccessful coup attempt in Lisbon, fled to Spain, was put on a regular Iberia flight to South America. I had the idea to book myself as a "**businessman**" in **first class**, on his continuing flight from **Rio de Janeiro to Buenos Aires**. In mid-air he gave me his famous accusation that the Communists were threatening "**a grande matança de Páscoa**", which triggered his attempt with some officers. Spínola was offered political asylum in **Brazil** on the condition he refrain from a political statements. But since he had given me his version of history **before** the asylum, my scoop would remain a scoop.

Again, it was a battle to navigate the news, this time by the Brazilians.

Back in **Rome** as regional director for southern Europe **in 1976**, I continued to frequent **Portugal**, the Portuguese and my evolving **Lisbon** on its path towards **Europe**.

I witnessed how the **municipality of Lisbon**, with various mayors (pudor dictates my not using names) who dug tunnels and sewers, an enterprise which doesn't always bring votes to the ballot box. I always admired that, whatever the party.

After various careers in media jobs, it was my wife **Zeynep**, who convinced me that **Lisbon** did not just have the seven hills of **Istanbul** or of **Rome**, but deserved a firm anchoring here for us at "**the Queen of the Seas**".

I could go on for many hours about Lisbon and my deep affection and gratitude for its hospitality and virtues.

Let me just zoom in on some of the **unusual places** here which have marked my life then,, and now. In a way they are **heteronomical**, to coin a word, adopting various identities through their lives.

First, the **Bridge** whose construction and inauguration I witnessed, for two years-- a symbol of American craft and Portuguese ingenuity. I had the privilege of climbing the south pylon **in 1966** for a breathtaking view over the white city. A few years later, the bridge **changed its name**, like Delgado for the Lisbon airport.

Nearby **The Cais do Conde da Rocha do Conde de Óbidos**, the site of Portuguese navigation abroad, where later much of the European diaspora left for the USA or South America in some heart-breaking scenes. And then during my sixties stay, it was the place of tearful scenes where young men embarked to defend the African territories. And in the mid1970s, the flood of one million retornados who were absorbed by a poor country involved in a painful transition. so many identities!

I have been particularly hypnotized by the photos and videos of the wartime exodus photos and videos, and its portrayal by **Vhils**, next to the Gare Maritima with the beautiful frescoes by **Almada Negreiros**.

Just above, the **MNAA**, which I have had the honor of helping with the board of friends, is one of the hidden treasures of Lisbon which deserves a better destiny.

Have another look at **Yeronimos Bosch's "Tentações de Santo Antão"** as the **15th century** parable of our **21st century catalogue of tragedies: burning cities in the background**, mysterious flying machines in space and the sky, and abominable cruelty on earth with horrible creatures devouring each other.

There are so many magical places which have cultural appeal, but I choose the three **Ms** as my favorites: **Madracao, Mouraria and Marvila**, each corner also taking on a new identity constantly.

In closing, I want to thank **Mayor Carlos Moedas** for the honor he bestowed on me and interpret the gesture as his salute to the growing dynamic international community which has returned Lisbon to its status of global city at the cutting edge of venerable history and avantgarde technology

**Viva Lisboa and its resilient residents!**